

Marx House Syllabus

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# LENINISM

A Syllabus based on Stalin's "Foundations  
of Leninism" together with an  
introductory lecture by

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*All references to pages in Stalin's FOUNDATIONS OF LENINISM refer to the Lawrence & Wishart edition—price One Shilling.*

## ON THE STUDY OF LENINISM

*Lecture delivered on March 23, 1941, to a Group Leaders' Course for the study of Stalin's "Foundations of Leninism."*

You are about to carry through an advanced course of study on the basis of Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism*. It is assumed that you will have read the book already.

Why is this course important for us at the present moment? You are all comrades active in various spheres of work, holding responsible positions, and at a time that is extremely critical for the whole working class. Therefore it is a serious decision to judge it essential to carry through a course of this nature as the start of a wide educational development.

There is first our general answer to that question, and that is that we believe in education. The Communist Party differs from other parties in that all its members are continuously studying at the same time as they are taking part in the practical fight. Not merely is it a question when entering the Party, but all the time and for all its members, whether on the Central Committee or the newest members, it is an absolutely necessary part of Party work and equipment, just as much as any serious scientist needs continually to be equipping himself further with developments in his branch of science or he will get rusty and useless in practice.

This scientific approach is a characteristic of Marxism and of our Party. For us the question of policy, the answers to problems are not haphazard, and do not arise according to the personal feelings and choice of people, a matter of temperament—some people are by temperament impatient and therefore revolutionary, and vice versa. To us the answer to every question depends on the objective situation and there is only one correct answer for every specific situation. Our job

is to find that answer. But if the correct method and approach is used, that answer can be found and will lead to the results we want.

Let us take as an example that period at the beginning of the war when we made a mistake in our initial estimate with regard to the war—and the example is of value to us for just this reason. We had to make a correction of our estimate and of our consequent policy in the first weeks of the war. Such a change would have broken up and split any other Party from top to bottom. In the case of our Party it was possible to go through that period with the fullest discussion throughout the membership and get within a few weeks 99 per cent complete agreement and conviction of the membership on the policy that was reached and the correction that had to be made.

How was that possible? Naturally to outsiders it is not a credible thing, and they have their explanation ready. They say that it is a Party of robots, that it is only necessary to give an order and all obey and carry out the order. Those who put that explanation do not know our Party. I doubt whether in any other organisation will be seen tougher people who will not be satisfied until they are absolutely convinced on every point and have had every question thoroughly dealt with, nor in any party such complete and open discussion.

But the reason why it is possible to meet such a situation and to meet it with unanimity is precisely because of the scientific basis of the Party. It is not a question of people getting up and saying: Well, I said this and therefore I am going to stick to it, and going on thinking up new arguments to support their contention whatever happened. On the contrary, the situation is something which is outside all of us. If these are the forces and the way they are working, then there is a certain inevitable conclusion, and once that is demonstrated, every Communist, every Marxist whatever previous position has been reached, can be convinced and reach unanimity on the basis of the line. That is a practical example of the importance of the scientific basis of the Party.

It is further of value as an example precisely because a

mistake was made in the original estimation. It is true that had there been a more powerful mastery of science, knowledge of facts, etc., that could have been avoided. But the fact that it was made helps to demonstrate this for us. When we speak about our method being scientific, we are not claiming infallibility. It is perfectly possible for Marxists to make mistakes, but I think we have a method that does enable us more quickly to test out our theories, our policies, and correct them.

And when that arises, that process is always completely open, and as you will see is insisted upon in the book, the attitude of a party to its mistakes is one of the tests of a serious Party.

These are the general arguments of the importance of study. But there are certain special arguments on the importance of the present course in relation to the situation in which we find ourselves today. We have entered into a period of big and sweeping changes, of violent destruction, of the collapse of States. The whole basic questions of society are now brought more and more clearly on the order of the day for millions of people—revolutionary issues are raised by the whole character of the present war and what the war brings.

This is after a relatively long period of a good many years between the two cycles of wars and revolutions, during which the struggle in which we were engaged was more limited in character. Not as peaceful as in the pre-1914 years by any means, but more limited in character than now. Those who came into the Party during the 1925-39 period, and especially those who came in during the latter years from about 1935-39, a period when we were correctly conducting a special line of tactics that involved a very close association with all kinds of bourgeois liberal democratic elements, that involved extreme concentration on all legal forms of activity, that involved extreme emphasis on the importance of the bourgeois, democratic rights and the maintenance of those rights and the structure within which they existed—all that gave a different experience and a different background for members during that period, than the experiences during the years 1917-21, that

is, the years of the great revolutionary wave throughout the world.

Now that period is ended with the war. We have entered again into what is in its large significance, a new revolutionary era. It therefore becomes clearly important for the membership of our Party to equip themselves very strongly with the basic questions of revolutionary theory. And that is what is dealt with in this book; what is the essence of Leninism. That is to say, the "Foundations of Leninism" is essentially the handbook of the working-class revolution.

The *Foundations of Leninism* was written in 1924—that is a few months after Lenin's death. Lenin died in January, 1924; and the *Foundations* was first given as a course of lectures by Stalin in April, 1924. At that time, following Lenin's death, there was a great controversy about Leninism—whether it was correct to speak about Leninism at all. Could there be such a thing as Leninism? The dilemma was propounded; either Leninism was Marxism in fact, in which case there was no justification to speak of Leninism because it was simply Marxism—or Leninism was not Marxism, in which case Leninism was a revision of Marxism. That was the kind of dilemma presented; and attempts were made to resolve it by saying that while Marx in the 19th Century produced the theory, Leninism in the 20th Century carried out the revolution in practice which Marxism could only foresee.

It is obvious that this is a very unsatisfactory attempt to answer the question. On the one hand it leaves out the enormous amount of work of Leninism in the field of theory; and on the other hand it leaves out the entire practical rôle of Marx in the movement, both in the vanguard of the fight in 1848, in the leadership of the First International and in the actual guiding of almost all the socialist parties throughout the world as they arose, in particular, the German Party. Such an answer implies the complete divorce of theory and practice.

That question was resolved by Stalin in the first of his lectures. It was answered with extreme simplicity and a clearness that is very characteristic of Stalin's method. Here it is of interest, incidentally, to note the point of style. We

speak of the *Foundations of Leninism* as a classic of Marxism, as it is. Now we have, of course, four main teachers and masters of Marxism—Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin; and we are often told how Marxism is a sort of cut and dried system. Yet, in fact, you could not get more marked variations in style and character of individuals, breathing through each of these four, as you do get. With Marx the enormous philosophic, rich, profound range that you can only find the parallel of in Shakespeare in the world of literature. With Engels, lucidity in expression, the bringing down of problems in such a way that scientific problems become easy of reach for every reader. In Lenin you get extreme passionate intensity and fire that corresponds to the period, that really burns through every question dealt with, and that combines at other times with irony of polemical forms. And with Stalin you have a no less distinctive style, and the most marked characteristic of it is that power of taking a difficult problem, one on which people have got themselves extraordinarily tied up, and reducing it to such simplicity and plainness that by the time he has finished it looks obvious; you could almost read it and say: Anyone could see that. But at the time, these questions were not obvious. Remember what Engels said of Kautsky. He said that this fellow had the capacity for taking the most simple question and making it confoundingly complicated. Stalin has the exact opposite quality: the capacity to take the most complicated question and make it amazingly simple.

So here he presented the answer with regard to what Leninism was, and solved those problems which were actually being discussed at that time. He gave the definition that Leninism is Marxism of the period of imperialism and the proletarian revolution.

That definition tells a lot. It shows first that Marxism is always moving, is always growing. It is the exact opposite of a ready-made, fixed body of dogmas as its enemies always present it. It cannot be that because it is an interpretation of the real world. The real world is always changing and moving, and therefore the theory has always to develop with

the development of the real world. Marxism can never stand still. There are lots of relics that you will find at many stages of the route of Marxism of people who get left behind—who went a little way and then stopped when the next new development arose and were not prepared to go further, and remain muttering their old shibboleths and declaring everything which has happened since has gone all wrong.

In fact Marxism is continually growing in this way, and every one of you can add to Marxism. Only it is necessary to make sure first that you have understood what has already been achieved and that you are not simply bringing up old exploded difficulties as if they were new developments of Marxism.

Consequently this definition shows the character of the new problems with which Leninism deals—that is, the problems of imperialism and revolution.

From the turn of the 20th Century, one might say that everyone felt there was a kind of new period. Conditions were changed; there were new problems. Alongside of this there developed a retreat from the basis of Marxism within the socialist movement. And whilst we know the grounds of that—the real grounds in imperialism and the corruption of the upper strata of the labour movement—it was often presented in the form of declaring: Yes, Marxism dealt with the 19th Century which is behind us and gone; it is absolutely old-fashioned now and is no use to our present problems. As against these “revisionists,” there were many who called themselves orthodox Marxists, but who only repeated word for word what Marx wrote in the 19th Century, leaving people more and more dissatisfied as they were faced with new problems.

It is here that Leninism met that situation by facing in a completely realistic fashion the new character of the period that had developed. It was a different form of capitalism from what Marx had known. Not that Marx was out of date; on the contrary, the lines of analysis of Marxism gave the possibility of interpreting the new period, that is imperialism. Leninism worked out the general lines you are familiar with,

the analysis of imperialism, of the period of wars and revolutions.

This means further that Leninism and the study of it is the closest to our own epoch and our own problems. Marxism is, of course, the necessary elementary basis—you cannot study Leninism without the basis of Marxism. In this course it is assumed that you have that basis of Marxism, the understanding of capitalism and socialism, the rôle of the working-class movement and so on. The kind of ground that is covered in the *Communist Manifesto*, *Wage Labour and Capital*, etc. This is an advanced course. That is, given this basis of a general Marxist understanding, you are here concentrating on the problem of how to carry out the working-class revolution.

The *Foundations of Leninism* is a classic of Marxism. We might say that it is the main classic of Marxism written since the death of Lenin, alongside the more recent *History of the C.P.S.U.(B)*. Those of you who have studied, as I hope all here will have done, the *History*, have seen there the same essential problem—how the working class wins and holds power—dealt with on the basis of history. The practice is shown in the light of a complete theoretical understanding. Here in the “Foundations” you get the essential theory, although, of course, that in turn is illuminated with many examples from practice.

One of the marks of a classic is that it stands the test of time. This was written 17 years ago, and you can study it and learn from it enormously for the problems of today. Of how many works dealing with contemporary political problems written in 1924 could you say that they could even stand to be looked at today? You cannot really find an example. The leaders of the Second International also produced their works during that period. You have MacDonald's *Socialism: Critical and Constructive*. Nobody could read that today without laughing—and remembering MacDonald's own outcome. You have Vandervelde who produced a few years later a book hailed as the most up-to-date exposition of their theory. It was called *The Alternative*, and

in that he propounded the theory that you could draw a line through Europe along the Vistula and the Elbe and say roughly that on one side of the line was Europe of the horse, and on the other side Europe of horse-power. Europe of the horse—dictatorship; and Europe of horse-power—democratic Europe. Further comment is not necessary.

Therefore bear in mind that you read what was written in 1924. There is only one point on which the author decided to make a correction, and it is worth noting that point because it is of interest for us as an example of the Marxist method. In the first edition on the question of socialism in one country, he said that the victory of socialism is possible in one country—that is in the sense of the conquest of power by the working class. But the final victory of socialism and establishment of socialist production would require the joint efforts of the workers of several countries. Within a few months, by the end of 1924, he corrected that formulation. He said that two things are combined in this statement, which should be in fact separated. The two things are: the final victory of socialism, meaning that it is secure against all its enemies, that capitalism has become the weaker world element. The other point is the building up of socialist production. Already new factors and new problems were developing; namely, that the single socialist state was developing and successfully maintaining itself against the capitalist world, but the socialist revolution in other countries was taking time. Therefore, at once the problem came into view which could not come into view in the first years of the revolution struggling for its existence. How then are we going to proceed? Are we going to mark time until other countries are ready? On the contrary—the victory of socialism won't be finally secure until in the other leading countries the workers have joined us. We can, however, and will go ahead in building up socialist production. Therefore he made the change distinguishing these two elements.

This is worth bringing out because you will sometimes hear brought up as a wonderful revelation of critics: "This is what was written in the first edition of the *Foundations of*

*Leninism* but is now suppressed." Well, if you have the book you only need to go a little further and you will reach the series of lectures called the Problems of Leninism, and in that series you will find a section in which the first version is given at length, and he discusses why it is unsatisfactory and why the second version is better and necessary. So he supplies us himself with precisely the basis of what he wanted to correct. That, of course, is the method of Marxism—that method that is completely open, with the facts and the line of reasoning as simple as a laboratory experiment.

It is of value also because it shows this character of the living development of Marxism. You can foresee on the basis of Marxism the general line of development, the general lines that are governing social forces, their development and outcome. You cannot foresee the concrete forms in which these forces will work themselves out, and you would only be pretending to be a magician if you professed to be able to do so. Marx, in the 19th Century, although he could see with complete clearness from the development of capitalism to its doom, could most certainly not have foreseen that the working-class revolution would definitely conquer first in Russia; that it would hold power now for 23 years while the workers in other countries were not yet able to conquer capitalism; that capitalism would pass through two major imperialist wars, etc. All these are the detailed working out you can only reach as the things develop themselves. And so, of course, the theory is continually developing with the events, and therefore this correction of a formulation is exactly an example of how the progress of the tasks of the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union is going forward and raising new problems, which in turn made necessary the corresponding further formulations.

What does the *Foundations of Leninism* teach? Of course, as Stalin says at the outset, to deal with Leninism is a big subject, and he is only giving a synopsis. It would be idle to summarise the synopsis given. Essentially the subject matter of the *Foundations of Leninism* is how the working class wins and holds power—that is, it deals with the working-class



revolution—the historical roots of Leninism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, Soviet Power and democracy, organisation and policy, the peasantry and the national question, strategy and tactics and style in work. Alongside of that there is the closely connected subject of what you might call: How the working-class movement can go wrong and not win power—that is, the theory and practice of the Second International.

There is, as you will see, a ceaseless polemic through the book all the time, at the same time as he is expounding the positive policy, against these alternative methods. That, of course, is characteristic of Marxism, and especially of Leninism, because Leninism grew and became strong in conflict with the opportunism of the Second International, the fight against which was, and remains, the essential condition for victory over capitalism.

In this way, accompanying the positive teaching of how to accomplish the working-class revolution, is the treatment of opportunism, which is of course especially important for us in this country where it is so strong and powerful in the Labour movement. You might find it useful, precisely because he does not put a chapter on opportunism, as you study the book to list the references to it and note them together, because it is a guide to our own fight against all the theories associated with the Labour Party dominant policy, the T.U.C. General Council types of theory, and so on.

Observe the method of his treatment of Opportunism. Very often when it comes to the question: What is Opportunism? you find very limited approaches on the part of our comrades. Sometimes it is pointed out that they are traitors to the working class, that they betray the working-class movement. That is, of course, true, but in itself proves nothing except that we completely disapprove of what they are doing. When it is attempted to deal with it in terms of theory or policy, it is often spoken of as reformism, gradualism, the evolutionary theory, etc.

In point of fact, these are rather the terms they choose for themselves. They present the issue as a choice between a

gradual, evolutionary development or what they consider our predilection for violent, revolutionary development. If you will notice the treatment in Stalin's book, you will see how he begins with the description of the characteristics of the Second International in the very first pages of his book—describes them as representing the politics of adaptation to capitalism; growing up in a peaceful period when questions of revolution seemed far away, when Trade Union successes, election successes, growth of parliamentary representation seemed wonderful things, a wonderful achievement bringing great results for the working-class movement. So there came a complete forgetting of the revolutionary aims, an adaptation of the working-class movement to assume permanent, peaceful and harmonious capitalist conditions. Neglect of revolutionary education of the masses, practical Philistinism, parliamentary narrowness, etc. All these are the kind of terms in which he describes the theories and practice of the Second International, and you can see already why this is alive—he has described something that every thoughtful worker can recognise from his experiences without feeling that he is merely being offered rhetorical terms of abuse, nor such an utterly inadequate description as “reformism.”

As he develops his treatment, he brings out the analysis of what underlies this. The crux in this analysis is the theory of spontaneity—which he describes as ideologically the root of opportunism. Of course we know that the economic basis of opportunism is imperialism; it is the split in the working class through the influence of imperialism, through the corruption of an upper section, etc. But while that explains why there is such a thing as opportunism, it does not deal with the system of ideas. You have always to be able to explain both. Given a Labour Party leader of the J. H. Thomas type, he does not spend his time thinking that “I am achieving for myself and a small section of people a privileged basis by sharing in the exploitation of the Empire and I shall build my political theory on this basis.” These things hardly enter consciously into their heads. For them the sets of ideas have their own ideological roots, as it were. Hence the importance of this



analysis which shows the theory of spontaneity as the logical basis of opportunism.

The theory of spontaneity expresses the notion of objective forces doing the work for us, without any need of an active conscious role on our parts—capitalism will inevitably collapse—the working class will inevitably come to power—socialism will inevitably follow. If all this is not happening at present, it means that the conditions are not ripe, and naturally you cannot go in front of the conditions before they are ripe. Therefore there is nothing to do except to plod along very passively with our organisation waiting for the objective conditions to ripen, when we shall reach, at some unknown date, socialism.

Now this is a type of approach in which it is particularly easy for Marxists to fall if they are not careful. Marxism is based on a very serious analysis of objective forces. We do not allow our feelings and wishes to become the substitute for the real situation and forces. But this theory of spontaneity is a surrender to capitalism—it is the surrender of the working-class movement, because it is a denial of the conscious role of the working class in making the change from capitalism to socialism. And that means, specifically, a denial of the conscious role of the working-class vanguard in leading the change. The working class, as a whole, is not united to begin with, is not conscious of its role: the task of the vanguard is to give that understanding of the aim and task of the working class, to unify and build up their organisation, to overcome the sectional divisions, and to achieve that movement which is capable of ending capitalism and realising the revolution.

In other words, what Lenin insisted on, what Stalin keeps insisting on, is that the revolutionary theory does not grow automatically out of the daily struggle of the working class and the working-class movement, but has to be added, introduced by that section of the workers which has reached complete revolutionary clearness and understanding. The revolutionary theory of Marxism derives from the entire development of human thought and culture carried forward to that situation in which the task of humanity is to achieve the revolutionary

overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. The revolutionary aim and understanding is the conscious addition, the deepening added by the revolutionary vanguard to the trade union, economic day-to-day struggles of the working class. Hence our ceaseless fight against all the theories of spontaneity which are at the bottom of opportunism or the surrender to capitalism.

Then as it develops you will see in a series of fields how he shows the distinction between the revolutionary theory and the opportunist theory. As in the question of the allies of the working class—the peasantry, the national question, and so on. There he calls attention to the contemptuous attitude of the representatives of the Second International, the opportunists, to this type of question. Whether it is the peasants, or whether it is the national question, they take a superior attitude. They say, this is not proletarian; this is no concern of the working class; these poor, benighted people are right away from our stage of development. So they present themselves as taking a highly “Marxist” standpoint against the Communist “opportunists” who are, in their view, playing around with all sorts of unstable elements, with the middle class, nationalist forces, etc.

Here Stalin makes a remark that is extraordinarily important for putting a finger on the very essence of this type of question. He says that to take a contemptuous attitude to the question of the allies of the working class is only possible for those who do not care about winning power, who are indifferent to the task of the working-class revolution and winning power. And that is, of course, absolutely true. If they are satisfied with being the permanently recognised established “Labour movement” in a capitalist framework, a Labour Government, with consultations between the various Trade Union chiefs and the employers, and muddle along passively on that basis, then of course these other questions are not important for them. But it is precisely when you are concerned with changing society, with winning power, that it is essential that the working class must have its allies, that you must isolate the still tremendously powerful monopoly capitalist citadel, gather all forces against

it for its defeat. So all these kind of tactics, like the People's Front, are demonstrations of the revolutionary seriousness of the Communists as against the completely irresponsible attitude of the acceptance of capitalism, an attitude that is equally characteristic for Transport House as for those who present themselves as the "leftist" opponents of the People's Front.

There will be a great deal more of interest one can develop in relation to the question of allies. Stalin stresses two points. One is the peasantry. Do not hurry past that chapter with the feeling that this does not apply here, because actually the neglect by the Labour movement, including the Communist Party, of the question of agriculture is one of the signs of still insufficient seriousness in really contemplating winning and maintaining power in this country. The question of agriculture is one on which the revolutionary working-class movement has got to establish its mastery and leadership if we are serious about the revolution in this country.

Similarly on the national question. The fact that even the best sections of the militant working-class movement here have still to learn on that, is shown in practice. You all know how often in the preparation of resolutions at Conferences and the like it is constantly remembered by somebody or other that the colonial point has been forgotten and should be put in. That is the evidence. Because for a correct understanding of the nature of our fight in relation to the British Empire, this question would be before us all the time. And yet in relation to the war you will hear discussions taking place on the problems of national defence, defencism, what is understood by defence of the people, etc., all the time conducted as if it was a question only of a population of 45 millions living in this island and not with the consciousness of 500 million people living in the British Empire, 370 millions in India, etc.

Finally, the special lessons you will want to draw for the present period. One or two points might be stressed. One is the question of the revolutionary situation, which is dealt with particularly in that quotation from Lenin's *Left Wing Communism*, but further explained in other parts of the book. This is important for us. It demonstrates the necessary con-

ditions of a revolutionary situation: the crisis in the ruling class and their inability to continue ruling in the same way, and the determination (not mere discontent of the mass of the people), but the determination of the majority of the workers, or at any rate of the class-conscious workers, that they will definitely change the order of society, that they must do so, and cannot go forward otherwise, and are ready to sacrifice their lives for this aim. This is very important to guide us in relation to the questions that will increasingly arise for us: are we moving into a revolutionary situation, etc.? It is clear that all the conditions for such are developing, but it would be incorrect to call the present a revolutionary situation. At the same time, we must see the perspective. That is very important for our present tactical line.

Then another side, especially significant today and running right through the book, is its internationalism. Not merely in the conventional sense of the solidarity of the working-class movements of the different countries, but in the deeper sense, the full Marxist or Leninist sense—that is, really thinking internationally all the time. What needs stressing is that it is completely out of date now to think in terms of one country and the movement of a particular country, as you will find is invariably the case in anything written by Labour Party representatives—you might imagine that Britain existed in a vacuum, except that there is a chapter about foreign policy. So equally if you take any of the other reformists—French, German, etc. That, of course, is in reality in relation to the modern development of world economy, modern world political development, and so on, as absurd as if you were to discuss the problems of our movement in terms of Middlesex by itself as distinct from Kent, etc. It is now more and more a chain, a world front of imperialism and the world working class, in which you have to see all the links and the problems in your own country as part of that total situation.

This is illustrated again and again when he comes to any particular question. There are many striking types of issue that arise, in which you can follow very carefully the method and treatment of that international approach. How, for ex-

ample, in a given case, a reactionary system in a country (he instances the Emir of Afghanistan) can be conducting a struggle which is objectively revolutionary solely because of its significance in the world relation of forces; while at the same time you can have those people in Finland, proclaiming themselves advanced "socialists" and professedly fighting a fight for "national freedom," in reality establishing themselves on the side of reaction, White Guard imperialism and counter-revolution: this was shown, above all, by the world significance of their role (with Mannerheim, Chamberlain and Daladier against the Socialist State), and not only by their role in the internal situation. Again you can reach a point, he says, in which the particular national interest can conflict with the total world interest, and in that case the part gives way to the whole. This is of course important for our understanding in given cases in dealing with the national question.

If this international approach were more firmly grasped in the movement there would be an enormous lessening of the difficulties not only in relation to the war, but those questions about Soviet foreign policy—"is it exercising a dangerous influence on the policy of a working-class movement in a particular country, against the interests of the working-class movement in that country?" Such a question is impossible to present once there is a clearness of international understanding of the total character of the fight which is being conducted within the particular conditions within each country, but is in reality the fight of an international army of the working class and its allies against the world front of imperialism.

Similarly important for today is the treatment of democracy. At present we are engaged in the most active fight for democratic rights. The argument is particularly used by non-Marxists—"What right have Communists to call for democratic rights—they are against democracy, etc.? Why should they complain of the suppression of the *Daily Worker*? They did not complain when the fascist *Action* was suppressed." It is important that we do not let that sort of argument go by. Because this is a complete distortion of the meaning of democracy. Democracy, in the simple, normal

sense, means Rule of the People. The rule of the common people as against the rule of the wealthy and privileged. That is the ordinary common-or-garden meaning of democracy. The trick of these people is to present what they call a conception of "pure democracy," and by this they always mean protecting the rights of the exploiters and the wealthy and the privileged. That is the significance of their example of the fascist *Action*. Of course it was democratic to suppress the fascist *Action*, and a blow to democracy to suppress the *Daily Worker*. Complete democracy you cannot get until you have finished with power and wealth. The power of wealth distorts any degree of democracy you have got. The Communists are the only consistent democrats; but to reach that we fight for every bit that we have got that increases the rights of the working-class movement—the rights of expression, and so on. You will find he deals very sharply with the question of "pure democracy" and says that this is the theory of the upper strata in the Labour movement who have been broken in and are fed by the imperialist robbers.

Lastly, a point or two on how to study that may be worth touching on. It is necessary to read carefully and with thought. And it is not enough simply to read as a passive process. You have to be active in the reading if you are really going to learn and master what you read. For that purpose it is always useful to have pen and paper and to make notes. It is useful to have a notebook and to make your own summary section by section of the book. To leave blank pages in which you can add your own comments—either questions on points that are unclear, or arguments, answers to questions, and additional facts and experiences that illustrate the points. Another thing worth doing, after reading the chapter, is to close the book and to write your own kind of summary of what has been dealt with in the chapter, and thereafter to compare what you have written with the chapter in the book, because you will learn a great deal from that, both from what you have included and what you have left out, and also where you have expressed it differently, and compare your own expression, and the reasons for the difference of expression.

All these are simple, practical steps to master the book. Further, of course, it is important to examine the questions dealt with in relation to the experiences of the 17 years since the book was written and the present situation. Such a close study on the basis of a book like this is one of the best ways, in fact the only way, of really equipping yourself theoretically as Marxists and for Communist Party work. We base such study on what we speak of as the classics of Marxism; this is not because, as is imagined, we believe in a sort of bible of inspired books and in throwing about texts from them. Quite simply, Marxism is a difficult science. It is a science which sets itself the task to master and to solve all those problems of human society which have never before been brought within the range of scientific treatment. The key to its achievement of this task lies in its method. The classics of Marxism are successful demonstrations of this method, demonstrations which have stood the test of time, in particular concrete situations or in particular branches of knowledge. It is by studying them that you can equip yourselves, not in the sense of empty repetition, but of getting an understanding and mastery. Just as much as a scientist has to study what has previously been done in his field of science, so here the essential classics of Marxism and Leninism need to be mastered as the essential basis of theoretical equipment.

One last point. These remarks are no more than a very fragmentary introduction, touching on a few of the issues raised by such a book as this, in order to assist and encourage your approach to its study. But the important thing is to read less about Marx or Lenin or Stalin, the so-called "popularisations" or "explanations" of their theories, and more of their own works, which are much simpler and teach more. Further, it is essential to combine such theoretical study closely with your practical experience and problems. The choice of such a book as *Foundations of Leninism* for intensive study at the present time is not arbitrary, but is related to the practical needs of the present period. We want no more of the sterile type of "Plebs" so-called "Marxist" education, which, beginning from a desiccated, castrated non-political

"Marxism," divorced from the actual class-struggle, has ended in complete subservience to the Labour opportunists and enemies of Marxism. For all real Marxists, for Communists, theory and practice are inseparably united. The full value of the study of the *Foundations of Leninism* will only be obtained to the extent that you unite it with your practical experience and problems, and use it to enrich your daily work, to spread revolutionary understanding and to equip yourselves more effectively as fighters of our Party, of the International Communist Party, in this testing time, in order to hasten the advance from the present war and barbarism to the next stage of the world Socialist Revolution, the victory of the working class in Britain, Germany and other leading countries.

# Syllabus based on Stalin's Foundations of Leninism

## DISCUSSION ONE

### THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF LENINISM

#### Purpose of the Discussion

1. To reach an understanding of Leninism in relation to Marxism.
2. To study the chief contradictions of capitalism, and show why in the period of imperialism these reach their most acute point, leading to proletarian revolution.
3. To explain the method of Leninism, in contrast to the method of the opportunists.

#### Plan of the Discussion

##### *What is Leninism?*

Marxism gives a scientific view of the world and the development of society; Leninism is based on Marxism. Leninism is Marxism of the era of developed imperialism and the proletarian revolution. To study Leninism means to study the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

*Leninism as the restoration and development of Marxism; what made it essential both to restore and develop Marxism?*

- (a) distortion and suppression of Marxism by the Second International;
- (b) the development of capitalism to its highest and last stage, imperialism;
- (c) the new conditions of class struggle in the era of imperialism in that "imperialism carries the contradictions of capitalism to the extreme limit, beyond which revolution begins."

*What are the basic contradictions of capitalism; why do these contradictions reach their most acute point in the imperialist stage of capitalism?*

Note the three basic contradictions inherent in capitalism and explain why they reach their most extreme point under conditions of imperialism:

- (a) between labour and capital—effects of monopoly capitalism and domination of finance capital;
- (b) between rival financial groups and powers—leading to world wars for re-division and domination of the world in the imperialist stage;

- (c) between the ruling nations, i.e., the imperialist powers, and the colonial peoples—export of capital leading to increased exploitation and oppression which develop national consciousness and revolutionary liberation movements in colonies.

*How do these conditions affect the class struggle of the proletariat? In what sense do they create favourable conditions for proletarian revolution?*

*Have these basic contradictions developed even further since Stalin wrote of them in 1924? Give examples.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Why was Russia the home of Leninism? Why did the world proletarian revolution achieve its first decisive victory over imperialism in Russia? What significance has this for the present day?*

Summarise points made in answers and Stalin's remarks on pp. 16-18 by explaining Lenin's definition of the law of uneven development of capitalism. Under imperialism the uneven development and contradictions have grown particularly acute. Complete division of the world between the imperialist powers means that a more rapid rate of development in one country upsets the balance between the powers and leads to imperialist war. The conflicts arising from the uneven development of capitalism undermine the strength of imperialism, and reveal the weaker links in imperialism; i.e., those countries in which all basic contradictions of capitalism reach their most extreme point. Provided that there exists "a real force capable of solving the contradictions of imperialism in a revolutionary way," the world imperialist chain can be broken, and the victory of socialism achieved, at these weakest links (see also *History C.P.S.U.(B)*, ch. 6, pp. 168-9).

*How is the present war weakening imperialism?*

*What examples can be given of "weak links" today?*

\* \* \* \* \*

*It has been noted that Leninism represents both the RESTORATION and FURTHER DEVELOPMENT of Marxism. Why was the restoring of Marxism an essential condition for its further development?*

Note the following points, which should be brought out by means of questions and summarised:

- (a) What were the characteristics of the period of "domination of the opportunism of the Second International"? (the relatively peaceful development of capitalism, etc.)

- (b) What is the nature of opportunism? ("Opportunism means sacrificing to the temporary interests of an insignificant minority of the workers the fundamental interests of the masses, or, in other words, an alliance of a part of the workers with the bourgeoisie"—Lenin, *War and the Second International*, p. 39.)
- (c) What were the characteristic methods of the Second International? (i.e., political bargaining, parliamentary scheming, etc?)

*What are the main features of the Leninist method?*

- (a) unity of theory and practice;  
 (b) testing policy by deeds, not words.  
 (On these two points, bring out examples to show the division between theory and practice, words and deeds, in the work of the reformists, and their unity in the work of Marxist parties.)
- (c) Organisation of Marxist party and its work in such a way as to fit it to train masses for revolutionary struggle.  
 (e.g., such a party cannot base its organisation on electoral activity and electoral units.)
- (d) Self-criticism, vigilance in checking up political line and work.  
 (e.g., theory is a guide to action; Marxist theory does not give guarantee against mistakes, but self-criticism enables mistakes to be quickly corrected.)

### Essential Reading

*Foundations*: Introduction I Historical Roots of Leninism.  
 II Method.

### Further Reading

*Imperialism*. V. I. Lenin. Chapter VII. Lawrence & Wishart. Little Lenin Library. 1/6.  
*History of the C.P.S.U.(B)*. Chapter IV, Section II, p. 105. Collet's. 1/6.  
*War and the Second International*. V. I. Lenin. Particularly Section VII. Lawrence & Wishart. Little Lenin Library. 1/-.

## DISCUSSION TWO WORKING-CLASS POWER

### Purpose of the Discussion

1. To show the importance of Marxist-Leninist theory for the working class, plus the need for constant struggle against the influence of opportunist theories and falsification of Marxism.
2. To explain and illustrate some main aspects of the theory of proletarian revolution, in contrast to the dogmas of the reformists.
3. To show the rôle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the conquest of political power and the transition from capitalism to Communism.

### Plan of the Discussion

*What is the importance of theory?*

Theory is the summing-up of the experiences of the working class in all countries. Show why theory without practice is barren, and practice without theory is blind. Show how theory becomes a tremendous force when it is linked with practice and grips the masses.

*Why is contempt for, or neglect of, theory by practical workers "fraught with danger for the cause"?*

*Apply this to the party of the working class as a whole: can such a party fulfil the rôle of vanguard if its activities are not based on revolutionary theory?*

*What is the essence of opportunist theory? Why is the struggle to break down the influence of opportunist theories essential before Marxist theory can grip the masses?*

Stalin sums up the gist of opportunist theories giving examples also of distortion of Marxism. Explain some typical forms which these theories and distortion of Marxism have taken in the British Labour Movement.

\* \* \* \*

*What are the conditions which make imperialism "the eve of the Socialist Revolution"?*

1. The parasitic character of monopolist capitalism develops the revolt of the masses against the foundations of capitalism in the "mother countries."
2. The exploitation of the whole world (excluding the Soviet Union) by a handful of imperialist countries develops the revolt of the colonial peoples.
3. Uneven development leads to imperialist wars for re-division

of the world, weakening imperialism and facilitating the establishment of a world revolutionary front.

*Stalin cites examples of the contrast between the Leninist theory of proletarian revolution and the dogmas of the Second International. What examples can be drawn from the reformist theoreticians and pseudo-Marxists in Britain?*

e.g., impossibility of working-class revolution in Britain (food supplies, "national character," etc.), incapacity of colonial people for self-government.

\* \* \* \*

*What constitutes a revolutionary situation and what are the conditions essential for victory of the proletarian revolution?*

Examine in detail the passage from *Left Wing Communism* quoted by Stalin on pp. 40-41. Are such conditions prevalent in Britain? Are they maturing? Will they ripen "spontaneously"?

*What is the central question in the proletarian revolution and the transition from capitalism to Communism?*

"The fundamental question of revolution is the question of power." (Lenin, quoted, p. 42.)

*What do the reformists mean by "winning political power"?*

Electoral victories; parliamentary majorities; participation in coalition governments; Labour governments; in this way gain control of state and organise gradual transition to Socialism.

Why does this inevitably lead to alliance with capitalism against class struggle of workers?

*What is political power? Through what means does the capitalist class impose and maintain its position as an exploiting and ruling class?*

The state is the instrument of capitalist dictatorship over the working class. Can the working class "simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purpose"?

*What is the dictatorship of the proletariat, and what are its tasks?*

Not just a change of government, but a "new state with new organs of power."

Seizure of power only the beginning, to retain and consolidate power, working class must be organised to carry through three main tasks:

- (a) break resistance of the bourgeoisie, which for a time remains stronger than the proletariat which has overthrown it;
- (b) organise construction and socialist production;
- (c) build up a Red Army, Navy and Air Force.

*From what sources do the overthrown bourgeoisie draw their strength?*

*What examples can be given to show how the bourgeoisie cherish the hope of restoring capitalism and work for it years after the revolution?*

*What is the essential difference between the dictatorship of the proletariat and all hitherto existing dictatorships?*

All other state forms represent dictatorship of the exploiting minority over the exploited majority; Soviet state the exact opposite.

*What is the nature of capitalist democracy?*

*What is the nature of proletarian, socialist democracy?*

*What is the form in which the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the proletarian state, is organised?*

The Soviets. Arise as organs of revolutionary struggle for power (note four features described on p. 51); on conquest of power Soviets become transformed into organs of power, i.e., the state form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

*What are the characteristic features of Soviet Power?*

Examine carefully the six characteristic features described in pp. 52-53; note how these features make the Soviet Republic "the political form, so long sought and finally discovered, within the framework of which the economic emancipation of the proletariat, complete victory of socialism is to be accomplished."

## Essential Reading

*Foundations III.* Theory IV—The Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

## Further Reading

*Imperialism.* V. I. Lenin. Chapters VIII, IX and X.

*State and Revolution.* V. I. Lenin. Particularly Chapters III and V. Lawrence & Wishart. 3d.

*How the Soviet State is Run.* Pat Sloan. Lawrence & Wishart. Marxist Textbook Series. 2/-.



### DISCUSSION THREE

## THE NATIONAL PROBLEM AND THE PEASANT PROBLEM

#### Purpose of the Discussion

1. To establish the relationship of the peasant problem and the national problem to the problem of proletarian revolution.
2. To examine the particular significance of the Leninist teachings on the peasant and national problems for the British working-class movement.
3. To show the basis and consequences of the opportunist standpoint of the reformists on these problems.

#### Plan of the Discussion

*The fundamental question of Leninism is the problem of achieving and consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat. Can this be accomplished by the proletariat alone, without allies?*

Note the difference between the Second International and Leninism on this question.

"Those who are marching towards and preparing to assume power cannot but be interested in the question of who are their real allies."

Parties of Second International "who do not want to lead the proletarians to power, cannot be interested in the question of allies." (p. 56.)

*Among what sections of the people, on a national and world scale, can the proletariat find potential allies, i.e., sections whose interests are bound up with the fight against imperialism?*

Note sections who are exploited and oppressed by monopoly capitalism, i.e., imperialism. On national scale: the middle strata, smallholders, tenant farmers, small shopkeepers, intelligentsia, etc. On world scale: oppressed peoples in colonial and semi-colonial countries.

*What sections of the people, other than the proletariat, are victims of the domination of monopoly capitalism in Britain?*

Examine the position of the small farmers, small shopkeepers, professional workers, intelligentsia, students.

*How has the position of these sections been affected by the war? Does the war raise any issues which provide a basis for winning these sections as allies of the working class?*

*On what basis can these sections be won as allies of the working class?*

Support by the working class for all *progressive* demands of these sections.

Has this anything in common with the vote-catching sharp practice of reformist candidates angling for "the middle-class vote"? (The difference between pandering to backward middle-class prejudices and supporting progressive demands which express the conflict of these sections with monopoly capitalism.)

*What sections of the people, on a world scale, are most severely oppressed by Imperialism? How does the struggle against national oppression affect the struggle of the working class?*

Note the division of the world into a handful of imperialist ruling states, and the oppression by these of hundreds of millions in colonies, semi-colonies and national minorities.

Note, also, that while the exploitation and oppression of colonies is a main source of the *strength* of imperialism, the growth of the mass movement for national liberation in the colonies is a decisive factor in *weakening* imperialism.

Hence, the struggle of the colonial peoples against imperialism facilitates the struggle for the working class.

*Is there any basis upon which the struggle of the colonial peoples and the struggle of the working class in the imperialist countries can be combined into a single world front against imperialism?*

Show why the interests of both movements call for this amalgamation, without which the final victory of either is impossible.

Basis for common front: resolute and active support by proletariat for national liberation struggle of the oppressed peoples.

*Does this mean that the proletariat should support every national movement?*

Note progressive, anti-imperialist character of national liberation movement of Indian and Chinese peoples; contrast to this the reactionary character of some so-called national movements, e.g., to restore monarchy in Austria, to "liberate" peoples of Byelorussia and Western Ukraine from Soviet rule to former status of national oppression under Polish feudal regime, etc. The first *weakens* imperialism; the second *strengthens* imperialism; the proletariat supports only those national movements which weaken imperialism and facilitate the victory of the proletarian cause.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Stalin gives examples of the essential difference between Leninism and opportunism on the national question (see pp. 68-70).*

*drawing on the practice of the Second International as a whole. Can these generalisations be proved from the practice of opportunism in Britain?*

- (a) general blunting and evasion of colonial issues; "moral" criticism of incidental "evils" of imperialism in place of class analysis and fight against imperialism as such;
- (b) special problem of British Empire as most powerful colonial empire and bulwark of imperialism covered over with phrases about "commonwealth of nations";
- (c) principle of right of nations to self-determination, including right of secession, substituted by phrases about "trusteeship," "preparing the natives to manage their own affairs," and "self-government within the empire" for India;
- (d) while opposing national liberation struggle of colonial peoples within "their own" empire, use slogan of "liberation" of peoples oppressed by rival powers to justify support for imperialist war.

Hence, need for "stubborn, continuous and determined struggle" against opportunism on national question: "without such a struggle the education of the working class of the ruling nations in the spirit of true internationalism . . . in the spirit of real preparation for the proletarian revolution, is inconceivable" (p. 75).

\* \* \* \* \*

*Socialists strive for the union of nations within a world economic system. Why cannot this aim be achieved under capitalism?*

Note the two tendencies of capitalism in the national question (see p. 74): (a) creation of national states (e.g., Germany, Italy, etc.)—characteristic of *developing capitalism*; (b) growth of intercourse between nations and breaking down of national barriers—characteristic of *developed capitalism*. But neither can be fully developed under capitalism; they contradicted each other: hence, "swallowing up" of small nations by world powers, and erection of new barriers to world intercourse—e.g., world monopolies, tariffs, etc., etc.

*Why do these two tendencies stand in direct contradiction to each other under capitalism?*

Note that "imperialism cannot exist without exploiting colonies and forcibly retaining them . . . because imperialism can bring nations together only by means of annexation." Hence, greatest measure of "union of nations" possible for imperialism is: (a) unity of oppressed nations under domination of oppressor nation

within imperialist blocs; (b) imperialist struggle for further "union of nations" taking form of wars of conquest waged against rival powers for world domination (e.g., League of Nations in this connection).

*Do the slogans of self-determination, right of secession and formation of independent national states contradict the aim of union of nations within a world economic order, socialism?*

Note practical experience of U.S.S.R.:

- (a) active support of Bolsheviks for struggle of oppressed nationalities in old Tsarist Empire;
- (b) proletarian revolution liberated these peoples from national oppression;
- (c) sympathy and support of former oppressed peoples won on this basis decisive factor in victory of proletarian revolution;
- (d) mutual confidence thus established between peoples of the former ruling and oppressed nations laid basis for *voluntary union of equal nations* in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, on the basis of single economic order.

Therefore, no contradiction between creation of independent national states ("right of secession") and union of nations (world unity on basis of a "single world economic system, which is the material basis of socialism"); point to union of nations lies through breaking down imperialist oppression, liberating oppressed colonies, freeing working class from capitalist exploitation and thereby operating basis for voluntary co-operation and union.

### Essential Reading

*Foundations.* V—The Peasant Problem. VI—The National Problem.

### Further Reading

*Marxism, Nationality and War.* Edited by Dona Torr. In two parts. 2/- each.

*Marxism and the National and Colonial Question.* By J. Stalin. Lawrence & Wishart. 2/6.

## DISCUSSION FOUR

### STRATEGY AND TACTICS

#### Purpose of the Discussion

1. To study the strategy and tactics of Leninism or, in other words, the science of leadership of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat.
2. To show the difference between revolutionary tactics and reformist tactics.

#### Plan of the Discussion

*Of what do the Strategy and Tactics of Leninism consist?*

The system of rules or guiding principles worked out by Lenin for the leadership of the class struggle of the proletariat. Briefly: the science of leadership of this struggle.

*What is Strategy?*

Strategy deals with the general aim for the proletariat for a whole stage of revolution and with the plan for the disposition of forces, the allies of the proletariat, and the reserves that can be called upon. It is concerned with the fight to carry out this plan through the whole of that stage of the revolution.

*After examining the three stages of the Russian Revolution as described by Stalin, examine the strategy which applies to the present stage of the revolution in this country?*

There have not been such rapid changes in the stage of the revolution in this country as in Russia. Consequently strategy has remained basically the same in the last twenty years. The objective is the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. The main force which will carry this through is the proletariat of this country. Allies in this struggle are the middle strata in this country, the proletariat of neighbouring countries, the colonial peoples, and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. The main blow must always be against the imperialists of our own country and their allies, the reformist leaders.

*What are the Tactics of the Struggle?*

Tactics are a part of strategy, subordinate to it and serving it. Tactics are concerned with the forms of struggle and of organisation necessary for the success of a particular campaign or a particular action. They change with each change in the movement—according to its ebb and flow.

Example: united front tactics. Aim: to achieve unity of action and to destroy influence of reformism. Note application of this

tactic in different forms to correspond with changes in objective situation and tasks (campaign for affiliation to L.P. at certain stages a central feature in work of C.P. for united front, while at other stages this demand cannot play the same role—e.g., at present stage, when Labour Party is openly collaborating in coalition government). *In what form is the united front tactic applied today?*

*Also examine use of tactics in a particular strike struggle.*

#### STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

The reserves of the revolution can be direct or indirect. As direct reserves, Stalin mentions four: (1) peasantry and intermediate strata; (2) proletariat of neighbouring countries; (3) movement of colonial peoples; (4) achievements of dictatorship of proletariat.

*Does each of these apply to this country, and what is their importance to us?*

Among indirect reserves, Stalin includes conflicting interests among the other sections of the population and conflicts between the bourgeois States.

*To what extent has conflict between Germany and Britain made possible the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat already?*

Give examples of the use made of differences among the bourgeoisie in this country ("Men of Munich Must Go," resignation of Eden, etc.).

*Is the utmost use being made of reserves?*

In answering this question we have to consider, for example, whether the working class is giving all the support possible to the growing revolt in India and Ireland; whether the working class is bringing together and leading all the middle-class elements who are suffering as a result of the Government's war policy; whether the utmost use is being made of the achievements of the Soviet Union to win allies; whether everything possible is being done to develop solidarity with the workers of Germany, France, etc.

\* \* \* \* \*

*What are the principal conditions which ensure correct strategic leadership?*

1. Concentration of the main forces of the revolution at the enemy's most vulnerable spot at the decisive moment.
2. Selecting the moment when the crisis has reached its climax to deal the decisive blow.

3. Undeviating pursuit of a course, once it has been adopted, whatever the difficulties.

4. Knowing how to retreat in order to gain time when the enemy is strong.

#### TACTICAL LEADERSHIP

The essence of correct tactics is to use those forms of struggle and of organisation which will carry the movement forward at that particular time, and to concentrate on the central immediate issue, passing on to the next issue as soon as the former begins to lose its importance.

*What are the different forms of struggle and how can they be made use of?*

Examine the use of economic and political forms of struggle. The need to combine struggles in the factories, including strikes, lock-outs, etc., with the struggle against evictions or for lower rents, for food, for A.R.P. Importance of ability to concentrate on whichever form of struggle is the most important at the time, without neglecting the other forms, and to combine struggle in Parliament with struggle outside of it.

*What is meant by choosing the form of organisation which will carry the movement forward?*

Concentrate on those forms of organisation which help to develop the initiative of the masses and bring them forward through their own experience at a particular time. (Shop Stewards, Trades Councils, Councils of Action, Shelter Committees, etc.)

*What is meant by concentrating on the central issue?*

To seize the most useful link in the chain of processes and pass on to the next link as soon as this one loses its importance. Essentially, this means to concentrate on the issue about which the workers feel most strongly at the moment. Innumerable examples can be given, such as the campaign against the Men of Munich, on wages, on A.R.P., food, etc.

Take the example of any factory group and show how its influence has grown only when it has studied the desires of the workers and given leadership on the issue which is affecting them most at the moment.

#### REFORMISM AND REVOLUTION

*What is the difference between revolutionary tactics and reformist tactics?*

*Is Leninism opposed to all reforms and compromises?*

Explain the difference between the attitude of the reformist and of the revolutionary to reforms under imperialism.

To the reformist, reforms are an end in themselves, an alternative to revolutionary struggle because he only thinks of manoeuvring within the capitalist system, not in terms of destroying it.

To the revolutionary, reforms are incidents in the revolutionary struggle, which can be used to develop and strengthen the revolutionary movement.

#### Essential Reading

*Foundations.* VII—Strategy and Tactics.

#### Further Reading

*"Left-Wing" Communism.* V. I. Lenin. Particularly chapter vi to the end. Lawrence & Wishart. (Little Lenin Library.) 3d.

## DISCUSSION FIVE

### THE PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS

#### Purpose of the Discussion

1. To make clear the Leninist conception of the revolutionary party in contrast to the opportunist conception of the party.
2. To make clear the fundamental characteristics of a Marxist party of the working class.
3. To show that the party of the working class is strengthened by the fight against opportunism.

#### Plan of the Discussion

*Why were the parties of the Second International not fit to lead the revolutionary struggle of the workers?*

Why was it necessary to develop a new conception of the party of the working class? What is the essential difference between the Leninist and the opportunist conceptions of the party?

Parties of the Second International grew up in period of peaceful development of capitalism; new conditions brought new revolutionary tasks, for which these parties were not fitted.

*Is this even more true (or more obvious) today of the parties of the Labour and Socialist International?*

*Why is it false to argue that revolutionaries "can do better work" by remaining in the old opportunist parties than by building a new type of party?*

In characterising this new conception of the party of the working class, Stalin develops six specific features, contrasting these with the characteristics of the parties of the Second International.

**First feature: THE PARTY AS THE VANGUARD OF THE WORKING CLASS.**

The parties of the Second International renounce the role of leader of the working class and represent themselves to be "national" parties, based on "community" instead of proletarian class interests, and pride themselves on being "open to all."

Leninism rejects this conception: the cause of the working class can succeed only if it is led by a party of the working class, based on revolutionary theory, composed of the most class-conscious workers, serving as a vanguard of the working class as a whole, its revolutionary general staff.

*What is the distinction between the vanguard of the working class and the working class as a whole?*

*What is the fate of a party that allows this distinction to become a gap separating it from the masses?*

*What is the essential condition without which the vanguard party cannot develop the consciousness of the working class as a whole?*

**Second feature: THE PARTY AS THE ORGANISED DETACHMENT OF THE WORKING CLASS.**

The proletarian party serves not only as a political leadership, but also as an "organising nucleus" for the working class as a whole. To accomplish this, the party must itself be the embodiment of discipline and organisation.

The party is, therefore, a single organised whole: every member is a member of a basic unit; the basic units are subordinate to higher party bodies; all party work is directed from the party centre.

Contrast to this the structure of the Labour Party: e.g., federal principle; loose individual membership; structure designed for parliamentary purposes; centralisation and discipline invoked to check, and not to develop, class struggle, etc.

*What is the difference between democratic centralism and the practice of the Labour Party?*

**Third feature: THE PARTY AS THE HIGHEST FORM OF CLASS ORGANISATION OF THE PROLETARIAT.**

In addition to its political party, the working class has a wide variety of non-party organisations—trade unions, co-operatives, youth leagues, etc.

*Why has the working class need of such organisations?*

All these organisations are built to serve the immediate needs of the working class or of some section of the working class in one or another particular sphere. The proletarian party is the highest form of organisation of the working class because it represents the interests, present and future, of the working class as a whole. As such, it is the one organisation capable of providing a general line and a basis for unity of action by all organisations of the working class.

*Does this mean that the party seeks to subordinate these organisations to itself?*

*By what means can these organisations be won to voluntary acceptance of the political guidance of the proletarian party?*

**Fourth feature: THE PARTY AS THE INSTRUMENT OF THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT.**

The party is not an end in itself, but an instrument (a) for achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, and (b) for consolidating and expanding the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The dictatorship of the proletariat covers the entire period of transition from capitalism to Communism; as the instrument of the dictatorship, "it follows that when classes disappear and the dictatorship of the proletariat withers away, the party will also wither away."

**Fifth feature: THE PARTY IS THE EMBODIMENT OF UNITY OF WILL, INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE EXISTENCE OF FACTIONS.**

The party must be united. It must have unity of will, unity of action and iron discipline. Factions or division of authority would obviously wreck this unity and are therefore impermissible.

*Does this preclude criticism and contests of opinion? Does it mean "blind" discipline?*

*What is the distinction between Leninism and opportunism in these respects? Is it that the parties of the Second International have no discipline and tolerate any kind of groupings? (Note discipline applied exclusively against the left.)*

**Sixth feature: THE PARTY IS STRENGTHENED BY PURGING ITSELF OF OPPORTUNIST ELEMENTS.**

Opportunism is the result of the influence of the bourgeoisie on the proletariat. The party must be kept free of this influence. There must be a continuous and ruthless struggle against opportunist elements in the party, which is strengthened by the expulsion of such elements.

*Give examples to prove the contention that the party is strengthened by expulsion of opportunist elements.*

In answering this question, it is important to stress the fact that all differences of opinion must be brought out and discussed and comrades must be encouraged to do this. A distinction should be made between honest criticism or unclarity which can be cleared up on the one hand and hostile and destructive criticism on the other. The latter can usually be traced to influences outside the party of a "Left" Trotskyist or Right opportunist nature.

In all its work the party must combine vision, foresight and zeal with efficiency in checking up on decisions, carrying them through, and in conducting all work of the party in a businesslike way. In developing this combination of qualities as a specific Leninist style of work, two dangers must be guarded against: (a) the danger of revolutionary zeal degenerating into "hollow phrasemongering" (e.g., planning and taking decisions without attention to carrying these through) and (b) the danger of

"efficiency" becoming a cloak for routinism, "narrow practicalism" (e.g., absorption in details to the exclusion of revolutionary perspective).

### Essential Reading

*Foundations.* VIII—The Party. IX—Style in Work.

### Further Reading

*"Left-Wing" Communism.* V. I. Lenin. Chapter V.

*Problems of Leninism.* J. Stalin. Section V in collected volume. Lawrence & Wishart. 7/6.

Worker Students who wish to develop their study of Leninism further should follow up the reading of *Foundations of Leninism* by reading the following important literature on the subject:—

*The Teachings of Karl Marx.* V. I. Lenin. 9d.

In this Lenin gives a brilliant exposition of the teachings of Marxism, which form the basis of Leninism.

*Marx, Engels, Marxism.* V. I. Lenin. 2/6.

This volume includes "The Teachings of Karl Marx" and a collection of essays in which Lenin expounds and develops further the Marxist theory.

*State and Revolution.* V. I. Lenin. 3d.

In which Lenin further develops Marxist theory on the state and dictatorship of the proletariat, demolishing reformist conceptions.

*Left Wing Communism.* V. I. Lenin. 3d.

Lenin's classic analysis of working-class strategy and tactics, in which he draws largely on problems of the British working-class movement for illustration.

*Imperialism.* V. I. Lenin. 1/6.

On the basis of Marx' analysis of capitalist economy in general, Lenin examines the imperialist stage of capitalism, showing why it is the "highest and last stage in the development of capitalism."

*War and the Workers.* V. I. Lenin. 6d.

A lecture to workers on the causes and character of the first world war, explaining the Leninist policy in relation to war.

*War and the Second International.* V. I. Lenin. 1/-.

Examines the nature of Social Democracy, the causes and

consequences of the collapse of the Second International in 1914.

*Leninism.* J. Stalin. 7/6.

Includes "Foundations of Leninism" and many writings, speeches and reports by Stalin, applying Leninism to social and international problems.

*Marxism and the National and Colonial Question.* J. Stalin. 2/6.

A collection of writings invaluable for an understanding of the national and colonial question.

*History of the C.P.S.U.(B).* 1/6.

Marxism-Leninism against the background of three revolutions, the conquest of power and building of Socialism in the Soviet Union.

Further courses of Study on various aspects of Marxism-Leninism are available from *Marx House*, which will send particulars on application.

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